

Testimony of Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

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Raised Bill 297

The Department of Education regards as unnecessary and potentially harmful to students, the requirements posed in Raised Bill 297. This bill would require that the Department establish standards for specific skills and information that all children entering kindergarten should possess for the purpose of the Department's School Readiness curriculum. The Department has already developed, published and provided professional development to teachers on Connecticut preschool performance standards and pre-kindergarten grade level expectations as part of the continuum of skills in its Pre-kindergarten to Grade 8 Curriculum Standards and it has also established preschool performance standards, published in the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework. In addition, the Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework outlines skills and knowledge through a developmental progression (ages 2 ½ to 6) and offers a system for documenting child skills attainment and growth over time. The execution of these standards and assessments of each skill area permits teachers and caregivers to structure activities that build on existing strengths and competencies while distributing accountability among teachers for emerging and evolving knowledge and skills over the child's years of early development.

All children learn at different rates, but over a fairly predictable time and skill sequence. Constant high quality nurturing and instruction provides the best circumstances for children to develop physical, cognitive, emotional and social competence. Standards regarding curriculum content and information on what children should know will drive the teaching staff in Connecticut preschool programs to disregard the importance of the natural desire in children to learn through building on their existing experiences, which could result in great harm to young learners. The Department has argued that the professional workforce in Connecticut preschool programs is still not at a level of capacity—in terms of educational attainment and proficiency in teaching-- to manage standards or interpretations of the same.

The Department believes that existing preschool and kindergarten standards, skill expectations and assessments are adequate to inform providers, families and schools regarding instructional decisions that affect individual and group learning in the preschool and kindergarten. In addition, the Department would require additional resources to establish these new standards. We favor greater investment in a professional preschool workforce to maximize the effect of our existing investment in preschool program standards, student performance standards, skills articulation and development and, preschool assessments.

For all of these reasons, the Department opposes Raised Bill 297.